

The Resources Available

The Historical Society has for many years been happily ensconced on the second floor of the Tuttle Library. With very limited funds, ownership of our own building has not been possible in the past. The generous offer of the gift of the Church creates an exciting opportunity for us. The remaining members of the Church congregation are offering financial support to the Society to help partially defray the costs of maintenance and upkeep, as well as offering various furnishings that were part of the Church's history. We will be able to make the immediately needed repairs and to lay the foundation for a long range capital plan that will need the support of the wider community to succeed.

As much a concern as funds is the availability of volunteers to oversee and maintain the property. We have undertaken a membership drive and hope that the residents of Antrim will support us in our efforts to preserve this important historical building, should the Society members vote to accept the gift from Jim and Carol Rymes.

The Next Steps

Information Session

Saturday, March 29

Snow Date: Sunday, March 30

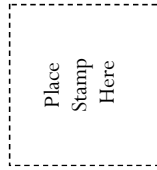
3 pm at the Antrim Presbyterian Church

The Board of the Historical Society will present its research and recommendations regarding the Stone Church. Both members of the Society and anyone interested in the Church are welcome to attend and participate in the discussion. We hope to see you there.

Vote on Acceptance of the Stone Church

Date in the late spring to be determined

To participate in the vote, one must be a member in good standing of the Society. Annual dues are \$10 for an individual, \$20 for a family. Please contact Liz Robertson, President of the Society, at (603) 588-2562 if you are interested in joining. Dues may be mailed to us at PO Box 172, Antrim, NH 03440. More information is available on the Historical Society's page on the Town's website at www.antrimnh.org.



Antrim Historical Society

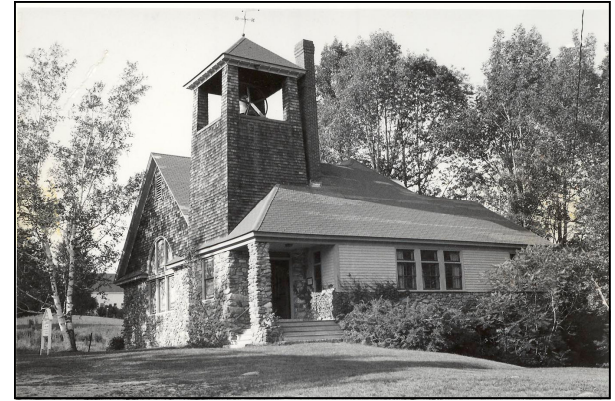
PO Box 172

Antrim, NH 03440



Raising the Bell, 1897

The Stone Church



In September 2006, the Antrim Historical Society first became aware that Jim and Carol Rymes were interested in offering the First Congregational Church, commonly known as the Stone Church, as a gift to the Historical Society. Since then, a series of meetings, telephone discussions and emails has confirmed both the desire of the Rymes to make this gift and the potential interest of the Society in acquiring the Church. A tour of the property by members of the Society revealed that the premises are in very good condition. The building, set on a striking hillside location, has a unique and lovely interior and a remarkable exterior of local fieldstone.

The only stipulation the Rymes are asking for is that the sanctuary be maintained for its originally intended use, that is, as a sanctuary. Weddings, worship and church services, funerals, concerts, lectures and meetings could be held there. The remainder of the building is open to any use the Society deems appropriate.

The Rymes have generously allowed the Society the necessary time to explore its options. The Board and an appointed Stone Church Committee have been exploring options in accepting this gift and will present its research and recommendations at an information session to be held on March 29 (snow date, March 30) when both the Board and the Committee will be available to answer any questions you may have. We have prepared this introductory pamphlet for your use in acquainting yourself with the Church, its history and the issues we see in accepting the Rymes' offer. We hope you will join us at the information session for a full discussion and we look forward to sharing your questions, concerns, and opinions.

The History of the Stone Church

Lyman Gilmore

The lovely old Stone Church on Clinton Road built in 1898 down the hill from the Grange Hall was not always as peaceful and tranquil as it appears today. Indeed, it grew out of a bitter dispute that still echoes in some Antrim homes one hundred and ten years later. In the late 1700s and during most of the 1800s, the majority of the town's residents lived at Antrim Center near Meeting House Hill, the geographical center of the town. In 1826, families at Antrim Center erected just west of our current Grange Hall a beautiful brick Presbyterian Church with a tall, graceful steeple and a Paul Revere bell. Because so many of our early settlers were Scots Presbyterians, the Center Church had the largest congregation in town, two hundred and sixty three by 1880. But as more and more families moved to the South Village, our current downtown, they wanted a Presbyterian Church closer to home than the Center Church a four mile walk, horseback or buggy ride uphill. Having discovered from the Presbytery in Boston that two Presbyterian churches could not exist in the same town, they petitioned for permission to tear down the Center Church and build a new church in the South Village.

In 1893 the new Presbyterian Church was completed at its current location next to the Maplehurst Inn. Naturally, many residents of Antrim Center wanted to maintain their beloved Center Church, and led by angry Center resident Eben Bass, they attempted to prevent efforts of the South Village Presbyterians to eliminate it. The South Village congregation filed a lawsuit against the Center congregation for ownership of the Center Church, and although the Center Church group contested it aggressively, the South Village group won at trial in July 1895. They removed to their new church the Center Church bell, pews, doors, windows, rugs, and bricks, and in 1896 the Center Brick Church was demolished.

Determined to have their own church at the Center, in 1897 Eben Bass and other residents began construction out of fieldstone found on the site what would be completed in 1898 as the 1st Congregational Church of Antrim, "The Stone Church." As described in *Parades and Promenades*, "The church prospered for many years. At times, the congregation reached the two hundred mark. Morning and evening services were held regularly, as well as midweek and preparatory

services. Church suppers (for as little as ten cents in the early days), harvest suppers served by the best cooks in town, it was said, and strawberry festivals were-not-to-be-missed events. But with the attrition of time, the attendance dwindled, and by the year 1960 the meetings were reduced to an early service during the summer only." In 1992 the Congregational Society deeded the Stone Church to James Rymes who offered it to the Antrim Historical Society in 2007.

The Condition of the Church

A recent tour of the Church property by members of the Historical Society revealed that the premises are in very good condition, although in need of some work. The replacement of a broken window in the basement, painting of the back and side walls, electrical improvements to meet basic life safety building codes and a protective covering for the stained glass windows are some of the short term and immediate needs. The Rymes have recently had a new artesian well drilled, installed a new septic system, completed the pointing up of the stone work, rebuilt stone walls and extended the parking facilities. Bathroom facilities and a new heating system still need to be installed and the Rymes have committed funds to the Society to complete this work.

At the request of the Society, John Kendall, a local contractor and expert antique building restorer, did an on-premises evaluation and made suggestions regarding the repairs needed, both short and long term. He believes the stone and frame building to be in fine shape and stated that with exterior attention and occasional painting, it should easily last another 100 years. The building has excellent stone work and high quality lumber. Mr. Kendall's report will be available at the March 29 information session.

The Church was also toured by James Garvin, the State Architectural Historian, whose preliminary report will also be available at the March meeting. He noted that the church is significant as a well designed example of the Shingle Style, a dominant architectural style for both houses and church buildings in New England at the end of the 19th century. Should the Society accept the gift, the Church could be placed on the state and federal Historic Registers. If owned by the Society, the Church would be subject to less stringent requirements as we upgrade the property and its mechanical systems to meet basic life safety building code requirements.

Why We Would Like To Accept

There are many reasons why we would like to accept this gift:

- The importance of preserving this historically significant building and part of Antrim history.
- The preservation of the unbroken tradition of using this space as a sanctuary for church or worship services, baptisms, weddings, funerals, etc., both for those with a particular religious affiliation and those without.
- The furnishings and antiques relating to the Church that will be donated to the Society from the members of the former congregation.
- The use the Society can make of the space, including for meetings, programs, lectures, concerts, storage of large artifacts, research projects, educational purposes and as a museum.
- The increased visibility and presence of the Historical Society, underscoring the importance of historical preservation to the community.
- Minimal work needs to be done immediately to make the space functional.

The Potential Problems

There are a number of reasons why we are concerned about the responsibilities this gift brings:

- There are currently only about fifty members of the Society. There is a need for more members to handle the physical, organizational and financial demands of owning a building.
- The Society has very limited funds at its disposal for the future maintenance and management of the building and will need to diligently pursue funding for future needs.
- There is limited parking at the Church, requiring parking along Route 31 for large functions.
- Future use of the basement will require foundation drainage and concrete flooring.
- Security of the premises may become an issue.
- At present, the Church can only be used in three seasons.
- The uncertain future of the Church if the Society finds itself unable to maintain the premises in the years to come.